

COVID-19 TASKFORCE UPDATE – April 20

Good evening. Tonight we will be providing information concerning the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases; the current status of our Continuity of Operations Plan; an update related to ensuring food and essentials are reaching our senior population and others in need of a hand, and we will be sharing some positive newsworthy activities happening in the Town.

As of 4:00 pm today there are 39,643 confirmed COVID-19 cases in the Commonwealth; 1,779 confirmed cases in Bristol County, and 25 confirmed cases in Rehoboth. Unfortunately, there have been 1,809 fatalities across the Commonwealth attributed to the virus.

The increase in confirmed cases across the Commonwealth, in Bristol County and here in Rehoboth does not come as a surprise. The Commonwealth is in the middle of the surge and public health officials are telling us to expect the numbers to get worse before leveling off and starting to improve. Listening to the national news one might think the worst is behind us. This might be the case in *too many trees Montana*, but I can assure you this is **not** the case in Massachusetts or Rehoboth. We must continue to **act locally** to stop this insidious disease in its tracks. Unlike the visible threat we experienced a week ago today from damaging winds and falling trees, the COVID-19 virus threat, which is much more powerful and damaging, is invisible and continues to infect our community.

There are a few steps we can all take to protect ourselves, our family, and our neighbors. Social distancing has become engrained in just about everyone's vocabulary over the past few weeks. Staying at least 6-feet away from others will minimize the spread of the virus. Spread occurs when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, and droplets from their mouth or nose are launched into the air and land in the mouths or noses of people nearby. The droplets can also be inhaled into the lungs. Recent studies indicate that people who are infected but do not have symptoms likely also play a role in the spread of COVID-19. This is one primary reason the Governor issued an advisory last week to wear face covering in all settings when 6-foot spacing may not be possible. Wearing a face covering helps protect those around you from becoming infected.

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It is also possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes. Although, this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads, the COVID-19 can live for hours or days on a surface, depending on factors such as the type of surface and weather conditions.

And let's not forget the to wash our hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry. And always avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.

Contact tracing is also a critical piece of controlling the spread of the virus. Being able to immediately contact individuals who have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 case is essential. We ask everyone to keep their circle of contacts to as few people as possible and to keep a journal of who you have been in contact with on a daily basis. Each confirmed COVID-19 case is assigned to a case manager who consults with the patient on proper isolation protocols and obtains a list of those who had recent contact with the positive case. The case manager then follows up with each person on the list to determine the level of contact and provides guidance as to next steps. Keeping a daily journal is the only way to ensure you can identify the people you were in contact with 10 or 12 days ago. Our frontline COVID-19 medical professional is our Town Nurse, Jaime Conlon, and I would like to once again recognize her for her extraordinary service to our residents and her unparalleled commitment and compassion.

The Rehoboth COVID-19 Task Force was established to develop and execute a Continuity of Operations Plan for the continuation of essential town services and to ensure our first responders and medical personnel were adequately equipped to respond to the pandemic. We continue to evaluate the processes in place to ensure a measured approach in balancing the need to provide essential services while protecting the health and safety of our residents and town employees.

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Last week we announced changes to the process for using the Rehoboth Transfer Station, and were made to enhance protection for both the transfer station employees and those residents who use the facility. The changes were announced last week during the COVID-19 Taskforce Update broadcasted on Channel 9, were posted to the town website's COVID-19 page and a News and Announcements Alert was sent out notifying subscribers that an update was posted. The first day of operation under the new / temporary policies was last Saturday and overall went well. On behalf of the Health Agent, who oversees the transfer station's operations, I would like to thank everyone for their understanding and the mostly positive comments received regarding the changes.

Let me review the changes one more time for those who did not visit the facility on Saturday or who are not keeping up with the latest announcements by visiting the town website. Effective April 18th the transfer station suspended the use of paper tickets and will not be accepting payments for new cards. In place of the paper ticket the station manager will record the sticker number on the vehicle, the items to be disposed of and the number of ticket punches required for disposal of the items. The sheets will be turned in to the Board of Health Office at the end of the day and the information will be entered into a spreadsheet. When operations return to normal the sticker holder will be charged for the total disposal fee for the items disposed of during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, anyone using the transfer station is required to wear face covering and gloves while on the premises. No one will be allowed access to the station without gloves and face covering. Finally, while using the facility everyone must make every effort to practice social distancing and remain six feet away from other users. These changes were instituted to minimize the chances for airborne and contact infection of the Coronavirus while using the facility.

We have also been operating under new policies at the town office building. A hybrid approach utilizing both remote access and in-office time has enabled departments located in the town office building to continue offering all essential services and most non-essential, but desired, services. Resident requests are

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being processed in a timely manner and the day to day operation of town government is continuing. I want to thank the employees who have demonstrated enormous flexibility and adaptability to the change in work conditions and to our residents who have been very supportive and understanding as to why we took the step to close all municipal buildings to the public.

We are also seeing more essential boards and commissions holding meetings using remote access and at the same time enabling the public to hear, and in most cases, continue to view deliberations. We will continue to limit meetings to essential boards and commissions for scheduling and broadcast reasons; however, we remain open to acquiring additional remote meeting licenses in the future as needs dictate. I would like to thank our Director of IT and Media, Derek Rousseau, for his work in bringing the remote work capability and remote meeting platform to Rehoboth. This was a herculean task given the short timeframe in which solutions needed to be identified and deployed, and the age of our existing infrastructure.

The Task Force is also responsible to ensure our first responders and medical workers have what they need to protect themselves and others. I am pleased to report that our efforts in this regard continue to be successful and we are in relatively good shape. First and foremost, I want to thank the local contractors, businesses, and neighbors who generously responded to our initial calls for donations of N-95 masks. These donations ensured our public safety and medical personnel were protected until sufficient quantities of protective masks could be sourced. I look forward to the day when we can have these very generous people attend a meeting so we can thank them appropriately.

Our Chiefs have done a great job in sourcing needed supplies through their associations and REMA Director Bill Maiorano has been working closely with MEMA to bring PPE supplies to Rehoboth. To augment these actions, we continue to be successful in sourcing needed supplies through the commercial market. We will continue to coordinate our efforts to ensure our first responders have what they need; when they need it.

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Selectman Muri remains in close contact with our COA Director Linda Sherman and we are pleased to report our Meals on Wheels volunteers continue to deliver meals as they have throughout the pandemic. Utilizing enhanced safety protocols meals are delivered in a manner that ensures both recipient and volunteers remain safe. We would also like to thank Val Souza for her donating spring flowers to accompany the meal deliveries. No doubt the day was brightened for those on the receiving end of Val's generosity. The Souza Family Farm also donated the flowers for the window boxes at the COA. Thank you, Val.

I contacted Bill Dalpe for an update on the Rehoboth Food Pantry. Bill told me the pantry is seeing some new neighbors and the expectation is for an increase in the number of families relying on the Pantry's services as a prolonged period of unemployment claims more victims. Bill told me they have been successful in rallying new food shoppers and the Rehoboth Men's Lions Club stands ready to provide additional volunteers, as needed. The pantry can always use monetary donations to help provide necessary food and supplies to those who need a little help. Bill also asked for donations of toilet and facial tissue, which continues to be a challenge to obtain. So please, contact the pantry at 508-326-0293, if you have the ability to spare a few dollars; a box of tissues or a roll of toilet paper. Also, if you are a neighbor in need please contact the Rehoboth Food Pantry ~ they are here to help.

Now, to report a bit of positive news. Tuesday night first responders from around the area will be participating in **Light Up Sturdy Hospital**. A procession of emergency vehicles will assemble and then drive around the Sturdy Hospital block with lights and sirens. The event is being held to demonstrate support and appreciation for all those on the frontlines of the battle against the Coronavirus. We are proud to say Rehoboth will be well-represented in the procession.

They say necessity is the mother of invention. We are seeing more and more innovative ways applied to bring familiar events and traditions forward during this time of social distancing. Selectman Muri brought to our attention the other day

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that the local Boy Scout Troop is now conducting their meetings using a remote meeting platform. Congrats to the troop leaders and scouts for providing a bit of normalcy and a safe way to connect people during these challenging times.

Finally, we promise the weather will get better and the temperatures will rise. We also know that taking a walk outside is a great way to take in fresh air and see some of beauty Rehoboth has to offer. To this end, we posted on the COVID-19 page of the town website a list of town owned recreation lands which are open to public access and a link to the Rehoboth Land Trust which also acquires and preserves land in Rehoboth. Many to the Rehoboth Land Trust lands are also open to the public to enjoy. Combined, there are hundreds of acres and miles of trails to explore. We urge you to plan a trip to one or more of these properties and get out and enjoy what Rehoboth has to offer.

We will continue to provide posts to the town website throughout the week on matters related to town services. If you haven't already signed up for the News and Alerts service we encourage you to visit the town website and sign up today. It is the best way of getting the latest information.

Please follow the guidance around face coverings and social distancing and stay committed to protecting yourself and others. The decisions we make now will determine how quickly, and at what human cost, we can return to a semblance of normalcy.

Stay safe. Stay well.